DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 376 953 PS 022 758

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TITLE Slow and Steady, Get Me Ready.
PUB DATE Apr 94
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Conference of the Midwest Association for the Education of Young Children (Peoria, IL, April 20-23, 1994). For related documents, see ED 332 802, PS 022 760-761, and PS 022 763.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Child Development; *Home Programs; Individual Development; *Infants; *Learning Activities; Parent Materials; Parents as Teachers; Play; Preschool Children; Preschool Education; School Readiness; Teaching Methods; *Toddlers
IDENTIFIERS *Developmentally Appropriate Programs

ABSTRACT

Written by a retired kindergarten teacher with 25 years of experience, this paper presents the text for a video demonstration of at-home sensory activities to stimulate development in children from birth to age 5. The introduction notes recent research indicating that learning begins at birth, and explores the effect of early stimulation on babies' cognitive development, even for high-risk children. The remainder of the paper lists developmentally appropriate sensory activities that parents or caretakers can perform with infants and children, and suggests outcomes for these activities. The activities are organized by each year of the child's life, and include stacking and knocking down objects, dropping objects in a bottle, playing with water, and playing telephone games. (HTH)

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ED 376 953

SLOW AND STEADY GET ME READY

PRESENTATION
BY
JUNE R. OBERLANDER

1994 MIDWEST AEYC CONFERENCE
APRIL 20-23, 1994
PEORIA, ILLINOIS

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I am June Oberlander, a retired kindergarten teacher and the author of the preschool resource guide, **SLOW AND STEADY, GET ME READY**, the How-To book that grows with the child. This money-saving manual clearly describes 260 weekly learning activities, each of which is based on a different concept designed to complement the emerging developmental patterns of children from birth to age 5. Skills included in the book enhance sensory, visual and auditory perception, serve to refine fine and gross motor development, enrich language and vocabulary, as well as increasing a child's attention span. It is written in layman's language and motivates curiosity, creativity, independence, cooperation and persistence; all which aid in a child's social and emotional development.

I am a mother of two children and a grandmother of six children. They range in age from 10 months to 6 years. Although my children are now grown, I still remember how life was over 30 years ago when I was an apprehensive young mother. Therefore, when my daughter had her first baby and asked for guidance, I wanted to share my expertise with her. She had read that very early stimulation in young children would give them an enriched approach to learning and produce better students in school if done at the proper time. Her concerns were: What do I do? When do I interact? Why? And most of all, How? She wanted ideas on how to develop worthwhile experiences to stimulate and challenge her child through meaningful play. This concern motivated me to react to my daughter's request for a How-To manual.

Recent research studies have confirmed that learning begins at birth. Therefore, I want to focus briefly on the early brain.

Babies are born with billions of brain cells, many more than they have at age three and nearly twice as many as they have as adults. Between birth and age one, synapses expand from approximately 50 trillion to 1,000 trillion, demonstrating that an infant's brain develops more quickly in the first year than had been expected.

Sensory experiences can affect which brain cells and cell connections live or die. A child's environment influences the number of brain cells the child keeps and the retention of connections between them. Synapses not reinforced by what the baby experiences (e.g., voices, sights, smells, touch) shrink and die.

When extremely high risk children entered educational programs by six months of age, their incidence of mental retardation was reduced 80%. By age three, these children had IQs that were 15-20 points higher than children of similar backgrounds who had not attended these programs. At age twelve, these children still functioned at a higher level, and at age fifteen, the effects were even stronger, suggesting that early educational programs can have long-lasting and cumulative effects.

Ultimately, an adult has a 3 lb. walnut-shaped mass of gray matter consisting of approximately 100 billion brain cells and up to 500 trillion synapses (the number can vary by 25% or more depending upon whether a child grows up in an enriched environment or in an impoverished one).

Therefore, early stimulation is crucial for the development of vision and other sensory functions. Learning, memory, emotions, and physiological responses are molded in early development when the brain changes the most.

In contrast, negative experiences can have lasting effects because they can alter the organization of the brain. Children raised in poor environments can display cognitive deficits by 18 months that may be irreversible.

Children who enter preschool at age three also show improvement, but they never appear to fully overcome what they lost in the first three years. Therefore, parents and childcare providers need to be aware of what they could and should be doing to complement a child's emerging stages of development. Stimulating a child properly is simple, but it takes time - both quality time and quantity time.

My husband and I have developed an effective and inexpensive program that has proven to be successful in nurturing child development, from birth to age 5, not only with our daughter, but also from public response, through numerous favorable reviews, repeat orders, and recommendations from the educational and medical communities.

Since babies don't come with an instruction manual, **SLOW AND STEADY, GET ME READY** was published to fill that need, to bridge the gap between home and school and to share with others, the weekly, age-appropriate, How-To activities that were initially developed for my daughter and daughter-in-law. They have gained immeasurable joy and confidence, using **SLOW AND STEADY, GET ME READY** with their young children and I hope that you will too.

The first five years of a child's life are the most formative years in which parents, teachers and childcare providers need to be aware of what they should and could be doing to get children ready for formal learning in school in order to develop the total child. Children learn through play, whether they are alone, or with other children or adults. During this presentation I will show sample activities from my book that employ primarily recycled and homemade materials which demonstrate that <u>homemade play is the best way!</u>

Learning begins at birth. However, if the baby appears to be unresponsive to a suggested activity, do not be discouraged - try again later. Be consistent and be aware that babies are not time clocks. They develop at different rates and may not necessarily develop in the same areas at the same age. Each child is unique. Therefore, the recommended weekly activities are designed for the approximate age of the child and should be introduced when the child is receptive. I sincerely believe that many learning problems could be prevented if parents and caregivers understood what they could and should be doing to get a child ready for formal learning.

Cradle Gym

A homemade cradle gym is effective and can save money. The spool and lid, when moved back and forth, will visually stimulate the baby. When the jingle bells are moved, the baby's head will turn, because he will be attracted to both the movement and the sound. This activity stimulates the baby's visual and auditory senses.

Developing Grasp And Eye-Hand Coordination (using a plastic spice bottle)

Babies are visually stimulated by moving objects. As a baby matures, he may reach and attempt to grasp an object, whether lying on his back or stomach.

Developing Grasp And Eye-Hand Coordination (using sewing spools)

Rolling a set of spools, which are attached with elastic, on the baby's stomach, enhances his sensory perception and is a positive way to interact verbally with him, as the spools are rolled back and forth.

The Magic Mirror (cardboard cut out with an open center)

This is an effective way to interact with a baby. Babies are fascinated by faces, especially when they see a face in a mirror. When children are older, the magic mirror can be used to play, I spy, to teach colors, shapes, letters and words.

Face Observation/Peek-A-Boo (a face on a paper plate)

Babies readily make eye contact with faces and will often track the face as it moves. Peek-a-boo is an old game, but it continues to be a stimulating way to interact with a baby when the face is hidden and when one says, "Peek-a-boo".

Feely Squares

Sensory perception is very important in the process of learning. At an early age, an infant's keen sensory perception allows him to feel secure through the recognition of his mother's smell, voice, face, movement and touch. Feely squares enable a baby to discover the feel of different textures which enhance his sensory perception. Toddlers will enjoy matching identical squares. When a child is older, these same feely squares may be cut into fourths and used in making patterns.

Mirror and Pendulum

Seeing a face in a mirror and a moving pendulum, stimulate a baby's visual sense. They are good ways to interact with an infant.

Poking

This special paper plate activity encourages a baby to satisfy his urge to poke. On one side, the baby will feel soft fiberfill in each hole. On the other side, he will feel rough sandpaper in each hole. This activity helps develop the sense of touch.

Stacking and Falling

Babies problem-solve by stacking and knocking down objects. While stacking large detergent lids, older children discover that cardboard or meat tray squares will stabilize stacking.

Pull and Let Go

Motivating the baby to pull and let go of a spool attached to an elastic strip, develops eye-hand coordination and fine motor control.

Where Does It Belong?

Babies love to imitate. They will develop association skills by observing the placement of a slipper, cap and mitt.

Age 1

Life is a very busy time for a one year old child. It is important to capture the right moment to begin a suggested activity to stimulate the child. Notice when the child seems to be looking for something to do. The time could be early in the morning or after a nap. At first, you may have to do the activity alone while the child watches. This builds the child's confidence. Be patient. At this age, a child's attention span is very short.

Opening and closing the door or placing an object inside or outside, teaches awareness of the concepts: inside and outside, and open and close.

Put It Through the Slit or Hole

Putting objects in a container is a high interest activity. The baby must problem-solve, using small muscle control, to push a plastic disk through a slit that is slightly smaller in diameter than the disk.

Let's Go Fishing

A fishing game is of high interest to most children. The child can develop skill in pulling a simple clothespin fish up through a hole in a container. As skill develops, a spring clothespin which offers more resistance, can be used which will challenge the child to problem-solve in order to lift the fish through the hole.

Stuff It In The Box

Fathers should be encouraged to interact with their children so that they may also be actively involved in teaching basic home skills. They can assist the child to stuff different textured, knotted cloth strips through a hole in a container. This activity enriches sensory perception and fine motor control.

Drop Small Objects In A Bottle

Dropping objects in a narrow neck bottle is also a problem-solving experience. When the objects are inside, shaking will make a noise. Then the child will discover how to remove the objects from the bottle.

This Side/That Side

This side/that side develops an awareness of left and right, when using a collection of small objects, which are often discarded. This can be a high interest interactive game in which the adult chooses an object and places it on the left of a given boundary. The child in turn will choose an object and place it on the right. The game continues until all of the objects have been placed. The game can then be reversed by encouraging the child to take turns picking up the objects and putting them in a container.

Cardboard Puzzles

A child will learn that two parts make a whole by working simple puzzles made from divided magazine pictures or coloring books.

I Can Carry A Tray (paper plate) 6

During this activity, the child will discover a sense of balance and the awareness of light and heavy objects.

Stepping Stones

A large carpet square and a small carpet square, used for stepping stones, is a good way for a child to pretend to cross a river. The child must follow directions and remember to move the squares in order to proceed to a given point. Large and small muscle coordination are necessary to maintain balance.

Clothespin Snap

This activity was included because I observed many kindergarten children who had poor fine motor control. Consequently, they could not attach paper to an easel before painting.

Straw and Spool Stacking

Straw and spool stacking requires more skill than simple stacking. Children problem-solve to find the center of the spool and balance different sizes of spools for stacking. Older children may be motivated to build a stack as high as the child is tall using straws for support. Then the child can also count how many spools tall he is.

Age 2

The child at age two needs much to do, and may show signs of being responsive and ready for skill activities at an earlier time than those suggested. Introducing skill activities that are a little more advanced is fine, but going too far ahead may not be the best thing for the child. Consequently, the child may miss basic skills which would be a foundation for future developmental activities. Enhancing an activity with your own ideas and repeating previous activities are far better. This method builds skill and confidence - slowly and steadily.

My Name

This is a way to informally teach a child his name, age and sex. Teach the child to say this rhyme as a chant:

"My name is (insert child's name)
I am two
I am a (insert the word girl or boy)
And I love you."

When the word 'jump' is said in the rhyme, "Jack-Be-Nimble", it encourages listening for a "cue" to jump. This helps to develop listening and gross motor skills. To augment this activity, rhyming words with Jack, such as tack, rack, sack, Mack, etc., can transform this simple rhyme into a good, fun-learning experience.

Rub-A-Dub-Dub

Acting out nursery rhymes is fun, especially "Rub-A-Dub-Dub". This listening and language activity introduces a rhyme that is amusing to a child. With guidance, the child can be motivated to spontaneously say words that rhyme with rub, such as hub, stub, and club. This is also a gross motor activity in which the child curls up in a box and pretends to float and rocks back and forth like a boat on the water. The child may also be gently dumped out of the tub on a given signal. The surprise delights the child.

Put It On The Line

The activity entitled This Side/That Side precedes this activity. The same collection of small objects may be used. The child is again given freedom of choice and is instructed to place objects on the line in left to right progression. The child also becomes aware of the concepts, beside, between and next to.

Feely Bag Fun

Five different objects should be placed in each feely bag. The contents of each bag are identical. One bag is for the adult, the other is for the child. The adult chooses an object from a feely bag and asks the child to look at it, and to feel and find the identical object in the other bag.

Up/Down

A pattern is a way of doing something by repeating it. A child is instructed to put cups in a special pattern, such as up and down. Then the child may be instructed to make a pattern with two cups down and one up. The child may also elect to create his own pattern(s).

On and Off

Children are fascinated with rubber bands. This activity is a constructive way for children to explore with rubber bands to develop fine motor coordination under adult supervision.

At the age of three, the child is more self-centered and shows more independence. The child's attention span will be increased if the activities are administered consistently in an informal, fun, and entertaining manner. Too much structure or regimentation, may cause anxiety with both parent and child. The activities should be carried out with gentle guidance. Good voice inflection and self-control play a key role in developing trust and respect. Some activities may be used for behavior modification.

Colorful Fish

The magnetic fish game requires more skill than the fish activity mentioned at age one. This is a high interest way to teach colors and matching. Similarly, matching games with shapes, numbers, letters, pictures or words can be used for enrichment when the child is ready for each new concept.

Fold It And Discover

Prior to this activity, the shapes of the circle, square and triangle have been introduced at different weeks in the book. The purpose here is to introduce the rectangle shape by folding a square in half. The child also discovers that by folding a circle in half, it no longer is a circle, and a square folded diagonally in half produces a triangle. Repeating the folding reinforces the basic shapes.

Hit or Miss

The object of this activity is to gain skill in aiming at a target, eye-arm coordination, skill in timing, and anticipating the return of the ball. This activity is developmental and is of high interest to young children of various ages.

Tearing Strips

Tearing strips of paper is fun for young children, but tearing for a purpose involves following directions and problem-solving. Awareness of the numbers 1 through 5 is introduced. However, a young child of this age probably only understands numbers up to his or her age. Therefore, adult interaction helps the child by assisting and encouraging the child to complete the task of tearing strips and placing torn pieces to match the numbers on each of 5 plates.

Water Play

Water play is fun, whether it is free exploration, pouring in different containers, awareness of empty and full, heavy and light, or observing objects that sink and float.

This activity is a good problem-solving skill because the child must observe the size of the key, the type of hole, the position of the teeth, and also which side (front or back of the key) will match. Repeating this activity, develops confidence and reduces the completion time.

Finish It

When I was teaching, some children entered kindergarten unable to express themselves. This activity is a language enrichment skill to encourage a child to think, reason and speak in complete sentences.

Age 4

A child at age four can do more difficult activities than younger children. With encouragement and praise, he will do even more. At this age, the child is very curious. Take time to listen to him because you may learn something. Showing an interest in a child's thought, activities and friends, will help a parent, teacher or provider better understand the child so that he will grow with a positive attitude towards himself and his environment.

Patterns

This activity is developmental from the Up and Down pattern activity with the cups. The child is instructed to use items such as a collection of buttons, clothespins, color strips and keys to make simple or more complex patterns. This enables the child to problem-solve, using skills to further develop freedom of choice, awareness of a pattern, skill in reading a pattern, and predicting what comes next.

Sewing is Fun

At an earlier age in the book, threading yarn through the holes of a large button was introduced. In this activity, the child is instructed to use a running stitch around the outline of a fish. This activity develops skill in eye-hand coordination, more awareness of the outline of the fish and confidence.

The Clock

Many children have only seen digital clocks. To understand time, a child must first recognize the numbers 1 through 12. They must distinguish between the big and little hands of an analog clock and observe the placement of the hands at a given hour.

The Telephone

A toy telephone is fun. It develops role playing and skill in memory recall and visual identification of numbers, telephone courtesy, more awareness of left to right progression in recalling a telephone number, as well as an awareness of an emergency number such as 911.

Bouncing Bb

Even though letters of the alphabet have been introduced earlier, at age 4, weekly letter activities are arranged in alphabetical order. There are different activities for each letter and the consonant activities are interchangeable. To reinforce, develop, and encourage interest in the letter names and sounds, a simple puppet and chant are suggested for each letter. For example, the chant for the letter Bb, is "Bb, Bb, look and see, the balloon is blue and was made by me."

Junk Box

Every home with small children may enjoy having a junk box. This box should contain small items often found around the home that are commonly discarded. By using these, children can enjoy free exploration, sensory enhancement, freedom of choice, and skill in following directions.

A Dozen

Egg cartons can be used in many ways. The child develops an awareness of a dozen, skill in matching numbers 1 through 12, more skill in left and right progression, skill in eye-hand coordination and confidence.

Name And Find It

This activity challenges the child to listen for the name of an object, to mentally visualize it, and to feel and retrieve it from a box.

EPILOGUE

A child is ready to learn at birth. In order to develop the total child, secure relationships between adult and child should be established. This will assist the child in developing positive interactions, enabling him to develop healthy thoughts and feelings to grasp beginning readiness skills and a positive self image.

My goal is to motivate and encourage parents and childcare providers to take an active part in this experience and to lay a sound foundation for a child's development. **SLOW AND STEADY, GET ME READY** is an innovative handbook that can enrich the parent-child bond. It will encourage and motivate parents and caregivers to implement their own ideas for the basic learning concepts. Today's children are our future adults of tomorrow.

The best thing that can be spent on a child is positive quality and quantity TIME.